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— Obituary —

— James Jackson —

Died in Boston, March. 27. 1834.





OBITUARY.

DIED

IN

BOSTON, MARCH 27, 1834,

AT

THE RESIDENCE OF HIS FATHER, DR. JACKSON,

JAMES JACKSON, JR., M.D.

AGED TWENTYFOUR.

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It is seldom that the death of a junior member of our profession has called forth so general a voice of sympathy and regret, as has been heard among us since the death of this estimable and talented young man. There were circumstances in his private life which warranted the high expectation of the community in which he lived, and, in venturing to allude to these circumstances, it is in the hope that his example may speak to us in the tones of that voice we are destined to hear no more.

In our profession, the paths of mediocrity are crowded. There are multitudes of us, who feel, perhaps, some aspirations to benefit mankind by researches which would carry us a little beyond the circle of our common duties; and yet, who are conscious of a thousand deficiencies of time, opportunity, and education which fetter us to our daily task. It is therefore a public loss, in which the interest and honor of the profession are largely concerned, when one is taken away from us who has been eminently qualified by disposition, by mental endowment, by zeal and opportunity, to shed lustre upon a useful and honorable pursuit. Yet such was James Jackson. His profession was that of his only, his earliest choice; his mind was of good material, well nurtured, mature for his years, and peculiarly adapted to the nature of his occupation; his opportunities

had been, and continued to be, most improving; and his constitutional zeal and ardor, directed as they were singly to the science of medicine, were calculated to surmount every difficulty, and to remove every obstacle which would be likely to intimidate and to deter less gifted minds. It was a pure zeal, it was ardor in the cause of truth. It was like the zeal and ardor which actuated the mind of John Hunter, and filled that of the youthful Bichat; it was that unceasing prompting which always is, and must be connected with generous and noble sentiments; which carries men to the highest ends, by the most virtuous means. If it be deemed that this is the language of friendship, be it so; we know that it is the language of truth, and we record it, to incite those among us who are capable of it, (for even our partiality will allow that there are many such,) to devote themselves to those noble purposes in the art of healing to which our lamented friend had devoted the best energies of his cultivated mind. There was nothing precocious in his mind. His attainments, though greatly beyond his years, were merely the results of judicious cultivation in an improvable soil.

Dr Jackson was a graduate of Harvard, and a student of the medical school of that university in Boston. He was there distinguished among the medical students, for his industry, and for a talent of observation, which afterwards showed itself to be a very characteristic qualification. In the third year of his pupilage he wrote a dissertation upon Pneumonia, which gained him great credit with the Boylston Society of medical improvement, whose prize was awarded to it. This performance developed the tendency of his mind, and he afterwards became deeply versed in the diagnosis of pulmonary diseases. At the close of his third year he visited Europe, where he remained two years, until the autumn of 1833.

The first summer which he passed in Paris was that of the memorable Cholera Epidemic. Dr Jackson's conduct upon that occasion, gained him great credit for courage, science and philanthropy, and established his reputation with the medical students and teachers of Paris, with whom he was brought into contact. The notes of his observations upon sixty cases of this dreaded malady were sent to this country, published, and probably contain the most minute account we have, of the natural history of the disease; and especially of the morbid appearances after death. The dissections were all made with the minutest care, and the result stated in the most exact manner.

Dr Jackson visited Great Britain, and formed an extensive

acquaintance with the most distinguished individuals in the medical profession in the three great capitals of that kingdom. He possessed the happiest art of extracting information from all with whom he associated; the truly wise are always communicative, and to such men the subject of this notice always rendered himself acceptable, by his modest docility, and his intelligent inquiries. His method was, immediately upon being introduced to a distinguished man, to lead him to speak of his own favorite topic, whatever it might be; and there were few men, of any age, who could more readily measure the dimensions of the minds of others.

But his favorite residence was in the capital of France. It was here that he found the mental aliment best suited to his capacity. He belonged to the exact school of medicine. His observations were of facts alone; he had little fondness for hypothesis. His love of truth in medical investigations was severe and uncompromising. Nothing excited his indignation like dishonesty in medical statements. The teachers he most loved to follow were Andral and Louis, and with the latter gentleman especially, he was united in ties of the most intimate friendship. They were indeed kindred spirits, and the French Medical Philosopher will mourn, with unaffected sorrow, the loss of his junior coadjutor.

While at Paris, Dr Jackson was instrumental in forming a society of medical observation by the exact method. It consisted of a small number of the most promising and distinguished young men of all nations. M. Andral was president, and Louis vice president. They held weekly meetings, at which papers were read, containing observations made in the most critical manner upon the patients in the Parisian Hospitals. Their plan was to continue their observations of diseases through life, each one attaching himself to those branches of inquiry most congenial to his habits and occupations, and communicating from time to time with each other, adhering always to the most scrupulous fidelity in the relation of facts. With a view to determine more exactly the natural history of diseases, they had agreed to prepare the histories of a certain number of individuals, beginning with the period of their birth, and recording every circumstance and mode of life which could have a bearing upon peculiarity of disease, and to continue this record for a series of years. A joint publication of these materials was contemplated from time to time.

M. Louis exactly appreciated the character of his pupil.

He pronounced him to possess a rare talent of observation, and his strong desire was, that, after his return to his country, he should devote himself to medical observation for a series of years, withdrawing himself from the duties and distraction of a general practice. But this was not his intention, and his varied acquirements were just being offered to the public in the practice of his profession, when death suddenly snatched him from us.

It was to the observation of pulmonary diseases, and especially of tuberculous Phthisis, that Dr Jackson devoted much of his hospital attendance. In the diagnosis of these diseases he had acquired a discriminating tact which is seldom reached at any age, and was altogether extraordinary for one so young. In auscultation he had few rivals, and perhaps no superiors. He had acquired in this department all that could be expected from the conjunction of an apt scholar, an excellent school, and an admirable teacher; for he had access, at all times, to the patients at *La Pitie*, (to whom the kindness of his manner always rendered him acceptable,) and had the private and public instructions of M. Louis. His attendance at this hospital exhibited a model of industrious application. The clinique of M. Louis began in mid winter, at eight o'clock in the morning, and lasted till eleven, including the autopsies, and the clinical lecture. This clinique he invariably attended, and noted down every symptom, and every remark worthy of remembrance. In the afternoons he repeated, alone, his visits to the same patients, and carefully went over the examination of their symptoms by himself. Much of the rest of the day was taken up with arranging and recording the information thus gained. The writer of this notice left him in Paris in November, pursuing this routine, and, on returning there the following February, he was assured by the subject of it, that he had never varied his course a single day, nor omitted a single visit. It is from this concentrated attention that we are to expect the improvement of our art; and it is by the energy and zeal of the young, 'their scorn of pleasure and the love of ease,' that this improvement is to be effected. May the example of our friend operate upon such minds and with a happier result than this, where Science has indeed sown the seeds, but Death has reaped the fruits.

A translation of the invaluable work of M. Louis upon Phthisis was announced last summer by Dr Jackson and one of his friends. The expectation of the profession in this country, with whom the writings and opinions of M. Louis are

becoming more known, was highly raised by the announcement of this work, as it was expected to contain much valuable additional matter from the pens of the translators. Dr Jackson had been very diligently recording his observations upon an obscure point in the pathology of tuberculous diseases, the results of which it was expected would give an interest to the work. His practised ear had discovered a modification of the respiratory murmur, which he thought was diagnostic of the existence of tubercle in the incipient state, and, it will occur to every one, that such a criterion, if established, would be of immense practical importance. He had not, however, proceeded far in his intended work before he was laid upon his bed, with a fever of such severity and protracted duration, that the hopes of his friends were for a long time more than balanced by their fears. He did, however, completely recover, but it was to encounter, after the interval of two or three months, the severe dysenteric affection which in about three weeks terminated his life.

In the course of his residence in France, he had made himself perfectly familiar with the history of diseases of the skin. He attended diligently at the Hospital St Louis, under the able instruction of an interne of that establishment, and faithfully went through the excellent work of Cazenave, comparing the appearances as he has recorded them, with those which the patients actually exhibited. By patiently following this course he had familiarized himself with the distinctive character of cutaneous diseases in a very complete manner.

One of the last objects of inquiry with him while abroad was the perplexing class of cerebral affections, and his acquisitions in this branch, though perhaps less extensive than in some others, were characterized by the same exactitude which prevailed in all. Indeed, he was as little given to loose generalization upon any subject, as any one we ever knew. His impressions, though vivid, were not fanciful; his mind demanded the aliment of truth; and facts, not opinion, were the materials from which he extracted it.

It was not from any disrespect to the Surgical Art that Dr Jackson did not seek to qualify himself for the practice of that department of his profession. But he well knew that it was impossible for one man to excel in everything, and his was not a disposition to be satisfied with mediocrity in anything. He used playfully to say that he believed he must pass a week at Hotel Dieu before he left Paris, in order to qualify himself to be a surgeon.

The structure of his mind naturally led him to delight in pathological anatomy. His fund of knowledge on this subject was very ample, and had been collected from a diligent inspection of the numerous public and private museums of England and Scotland, as well as from the frequent autopsies of the French hospitals. We have often thought this exhibited the characteristic maturity of his mind; for morbid anatomy is not usually the favorite pursuit of youthful minds; and, for the most part with such minds, yields to the superior brilliancy of physiological investigations and surgical achievements.

It was in this department that he was strengthening himself during the short space that he remained with us, after his return from Europe, and he eagerly embraced every opportunity afforded him in the Massachusetts General Hospital of inspecting the appearances left by disease. The French pathologists, as is well known to the profession, have insisted very strongly of late years upon the connection between certain morbid appearances in the mucous membrane of the small intestines, and certain forms of fever. To this point Dr Jackson was directing his researches at the time of his first sickness, and with a prospect of eminent usefulness. His observations went to confirm those of the French practitioners.

The manners of our friend were of that kind, and conciliating, and polished description that constitutes so useful an introduction to the easy performance of the duties of our profession. His general character, however, has been so well and ably drawn in the notices which have already appeared in the public prints, that it would be superfluous for us to speak of him in his social relations in that strain of eulogy to which he is entitled. It is chiefly for the purpose of exhibiting his character as a model to the medical student that we have attempted this faint delineation of his medical attainments. And yet after all it is the man more than the physician we admire; for it is the moral more than the intellectual nature of man that exalts him to a fit communion with his Maker. In the midst of a gay and licentious capital, the subject of this notice turned a deaf ear to the blandishments of pleasure, and lived a life of moral purity and self-respect. He did not even suffer a refined taste and the keen relish he possessed for the contemplation of the works of art, to turn him aside from the high and useful purposes of his ambition. He was a general favorite with his French acquaintance. He spoke the language with the fluency of a native, and the vivacity of his disposition, and his con-

versational powers, endeared him to the people of that lively nation ; and perhaps as great self-denial as he practised, consisted in restraining the impulses of a generous social feeling, which was continually called forth by the most inviting opportunities.

Such as he was, well may we mourn his loss ! Those who knew him as we did, will ever preserve his image among the bright visions of memory. We murmur not at the decrees of Providence. We question not His benevolence, whether in ~~the dispensation~~ ^{this} which afflicts us is, in His hands, a part of that grand plan, the *whole* design of which is man's happiness and His own glory. But we must be permitted, while we bow submissively to His will, the indulgence of our human weakness at the destruction of human hopes, and to suffer the tears of friendship and regret to flow when we reflect that our friend has been prematurely taken away — that his was not the sear and yellow leaf of autumn, which is scattered by the first breath of wintry age — nor the full shock which invites the sickle of the reaper, — but in him was the freshness of spring, the vigor of youth, and the beauty of opening life.

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